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MOLINA AND COUNTY ASSESSOR WARN ABOUT PROPERTY TAX SCAMS

No Need to Pay for Property Tax Reassessments; County Does It for Free

LOS ANGELES (February 20, 2009)—Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina and County Assessor Rick Auerbach are warning about property tax scams from companies charging hefty fees purportedly to help lower property assessment rates.

“Don’t be fooled! Solicitation notices are being mailed by companies promising to help negotiate property tax reductions—and charging hundreds of dollars in unnecessary fees. They are even imposing late fees,” Molina warns. “Don’t get ripped off! You NEVER have to pay for a review of your property’s assessed value. The L.A. County Assessor’s Office does this service for free.”

L.A. County property owners have reported receiving mailings offering to lower their property taxes from companies using solicitation letters that look official. Many of these notices could be confused for forms from the State of California or the L.A. County Assessor’s Office; and may even feature bar codes and the property’s Assessor I.D. number.

“Neither Los Angeles County nor any other government agency approves or endorses these companies’ services,” Auerbach said. “Furthermore, companies offering to lower property taxes must clearly show they are not a government agency—and failure to do so is a violation of California law.”

The L.A. County Assessor has initiated an automatic review of approximately 500,000 single-family residences and condominiums purchased between June 1, 2004 and June 30, 2008 to determine if there is a decline in value.

- After April 1: A list of the properties included in the review will be listed on the L.A. County Assessor’s website.
- By June 2009: Property owners will receive a letter with the review results.
- Through December 31, 2009: Property owners who disagree with the results of the review may contest the outcome. If a property was not included in the automatic review, the owners are always able to file for an assessment review.
- July 2, 2009 to November 30, 2009: Property owners who disagree with the assessed value, may also file with the independent Assessment Appeals Board.

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MOLINA / PROPERTY ASSESSMENT SCAM, 2-2-2-2

Property value reassessment reviews are permitted under Proposition 8 which allows a temporary reduction in assessed value when the current market value of a property is less than the value shown on the property tax bill. Assessed value of property is established when it is either purchased or built; this is called the "Proposition 13 value". Owners who purchased their home or condominium at or near the top of the market may have a Proposition 13 value higher than its market value.

Decline-in-value reassessment applications are easy to complete and can be obtained by contacting the L.A. County Assessor's office at (888) 807-2111 www.assessor.lacounty.gov.

Property owners who believed they were responding to a government notice and have paid fees to a private solicitor, should contact the L.A. County Dept. of Consumer Affairs Real Estate Fraud and Information Program at (800) 973-3370.

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